

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT  
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EUROPE/CIA/>JENNINGS: It does not come as a great surprise to anyone < >NEUTRON BOMB> to hear that the CIA has been engaging in covert activity. It is usually a particular operation which gets the attention. A study by Harvard University now says that during the Carter administration, the CIA set up a covert program to try to influence reporters in Western Europe. As ABC's John McWethy reports, the program was aimed at getting some good headlines about the very controversial neutron bomb.

MCWETHY: President Carter in 1977 and '78 was waging a campaign to convince the West European public that it would be all right to put the controversial neutron weapons on their soil. There were protests all over the continent, demonstrations the CIA claimed were inspired by the Soviet Union. To counter this, according to the Harvard study, the Carter White House ordered its own effort to sway the press, an effort which Carter administration sources admit included paying European reporters to write pro-American stories. MARTIN LINSKY (Harvard Political Institute): We were informed that in February and March of 1978, press coverage of this issue changed dramatically in favor of the neutron bomb and critically of the Soviet propaganda efforts.

MCWETHY: Though the effort to win support for the weapons ultimately failed, ABC News has learned there have been other instances where the CIA was ordered to pay foreign reporters to influence their coverage. Government sources say the Carter administration had a plan for the CIA to buy local reporters on the island of Grenada to make their coverage more critical of Grenada's then new leftist leader, Maurice Bishop. Two years later, the Reagan administration, faced with tough opposition to the deployment of Pershing and Cruise missiles in Western Europe, asked the CIA to counter Soviet propaganda, in part, by buying better news coverage wherever possible. It is not clear how far the CIA went in any of these cases or what real impact their efforts had on events of the day. Such payments are quite legal, as long as the reporters who are being paid by the CIA are not Americans. Nonetheless, it is not something an administration voluntarily admits to doing. John McWethy, ABC News, the State Department.

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